

Taking the Mystery out of Mental Health

by

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A Mental Jungle Book

Preface

My motivation for writing this book came from hearing about a highly capable young man who committed suicide. The reason being that he felt he had failed his family and considered himself 'unworthy'.

When I researched the statistics on suicide this is what I found on the Mental Health Foundation website...

- *In 2016, 5,668 suicides were recorded in Great Britain. Of these, 75% were male and 25% were female.*
- *Between 2003 and 2013, 18,220 people with mental health problems took their own life in the UK.*
- *Suicide is the most common cause of death for men aged 20-49 years in England and Wales.*
- *One person in fifteen had made a suicide attempt at some point in their life. 201*

I was then prompted to look at the statistics for children and young people, and this is what I found...

- *20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year.*
- *50% of mental health problems are established by age 14 and 75% by age 24.*
- *10% of children and young people (aged 5-16 years) have a clinically diagnosable mental problem, yet 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age.*

I also researched how common is mental health as a condition experienced by people, I found the following information on the mind.org.uk website...

How common are mental health problems?

- 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England
- 1 in 6 people report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety and depression) in any given week in England

Also...

How many people get treatment?

Reports from both England and Wales suggest that:

- Approximately only 1 in 8 adults with a mental health problem are currently getting any kind of treatment.
- The most common treatment offered is psychiatric medication

The message I take from this information is that a lot of people experiencing mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression are not receiving any treatment, which I can only put down to lack of education on the subject of mental health and mental wellbeing for the population at large.

‘Taking the mystery out of mental health’ is aimed at filling that gap by providing education on how our minds responds to situations that cause us anxiety and depression, and what actions we can take to restore our minds back to a stable state.

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What do we mean by Mental Health?

Mental Health has a multitude of meanings from feeling anxious through to feeling depressed and mentally ill. It has become a generic label in our language for many conditions that affect our state of mind. There are also a multitude of ways to treat a mental health condition, from self-improvement books through to medication and psychoanalysis.

Unless it affects our lives in a very significant way, we will probably not pay much attention to our mental health. Most likely, we will ignore any mental health issue we might have, or we might mask its existence in some way, possibly through distractions such as chocolate and booze or by creating a facade.

It is worth saying that growing up in our modern world with a mental health condition does still carry a stigma that can easily make us feel 'not normal' or ashamed. Maybe, we feel we have a flaw in our character, or as in some cultures, we are seen as a disgrace to our family. We not only have to contend with our mental health condition, we also have to contend with the prejudicial views of society.

The point of this book is to provide insight into how our mental health can be better understood and managed.

When does it matter?

It matters when it affects our daily life, for example when we are not capable of taking part in 'normal' social activity, or when our relationships are chronically dysfunctional, or even more serious, when we feel our life is not worth living anymore.

The answer to this question 'when does it matter?' depends on our individual life-forming experiences, most of which happen in our early years and include our perceptions, our beliefs, our decisions, our values and our moral judgements. They will all impact upon our state of mental health and how we manage it.

For this book to be of value, you must be already considering, or at least contemplating how to improve your mental health. For many, that happens when their state of mind is not able to cope with 'normal' life (whatever that means). Many wait until they can't breathe before they ask for oxygen. Some never ask.

Anyone who experiences stress, anxiety, or a mental health issue should be encouraged to take action. The earlier one takes action, the less chance it has of becoming a life debilitating illness.

Caveat:

This book is written solely from the perspective that the originating cause of our mental health condition is rooted in our early years experience, and is therefore recoverable. It is not intended to address a brain difference such as a condition on the autistic spectrum, a learning difficulty, a psychosis or brain injury. Even so, anyone with a brain difference or injury is still subject to conditioning and therefore may experience a mental health issue as well as their brain difference.

A logical approach to mental health

In our modern world it has become the 'norm' to say to someone who is experiencing stress, anxiety or a mental health illness, "Go and see your doctor". The assumption is that the cause of the condition is medical and medication is the answer. Or, you might hear someone say, "You need to see a psychiatrist". The inference being there is something not quite right in your head.

Both imply you have a serious problem that only a specialist doctor can fix. This is understandable when you consider how little education we receive about how our minds work. Obviously, we would turn to an expert who has been extensively trained in the workings of the human mind. It is similar to owning a car or a computer, we know how to use them, but not necessarily how to fix them when they go wrong.

Based on the assumption we can learn about these things, whether it be our car, computer or our minds, I want to explore a logical approach to understanding and managing our mental well-being. Starting with...

Symptoms

As with our car or computer we recognise symptoms that suggest something is not working as expected. The same is true of our mental well-being. We recognise symptoms that signal something is not quite right. For example:

- Change in our usual behaviour
- Erratic or unsocial behaviour
- Shutting down on people and work
- Excessive anxiety or stress
- Breakdown of significant relationships
- Easy to anger or depression
- Repeatedly feeling scared or panicky.

I want to add another symptom to the list above and one that can be deceptive in its nature:

- Hiding behind a 'facade or smokescreen'.

This symptom has the purpose of hiding something that we don't want others to know about. Whether it is a traumatic experience from our past, or a bad decision we made, or something we feel awkward about or ashamed, or maybe we don't want people to know we have a mental illness. By having a facade we protect ourselves from public scrutiny.

If we continue to hide behind a facade, there is a strong possibility that our mental health issue will silently spiral out of control, leading to a more serious mental health illness.

In the medical model of Mental Health, symptoms are usually categorised under headings such as depression, high anxiety, panic attacks, phobias, OCD, psychosis and many more.

In the logical approach to mental health, we view the symptoms as the starting point for exploring one's 'condition', and we do not need to label our condition. The aim is to explore our past experiences until we find the originating cause of the unhealthy behaviour, which is the subject of the next topic...

Causes

Continuing with the logical approach to mental health, I want to draw a distinction between two types of causes, namely:

- Causes due to early years development (conditioning)
- Causes due to biological brain difference (biological).

The reason to group them in this way is so we can identify whether it is programming error (something that happened in our formative years) or a hardware error (a brain difference we were born with or acquired). By

grouping the causes in this way, we are better placed to choose the most appropriate course of action.

Causes due to early years development (conditioning)

Conditioning is something that happened to all of us as part of our upbringing within any society or culture. Our parents or carers are expected to educate us in the ways of the culture. Without doubt, some of our programming will be societal or cultural-related, but not all. Parents also pass down their own personal and idiosyncratic norms and behaviours, some of which were passed down to them by their parents. We end up therefore uniquely programmed with some traits that conform with our society, and some traits that are peculiar to our family upbringing.

In a way, conditioning is similar to writing a computer program - designed to meet a standard and yet flexible to cater for individual needs. When things don't work as designed, we have to investigate the coding, or in our case, our conditioning. In the process of finding the cause of our mental health issue we would be looking to identify one of the following:

- An **unresolved trauma** - although we can experience a trauma anytime in our lives, it is traumas experienced in our formative years that have the most impact on our adult lives. A very disturbing emotional turmoil in the mind of the young person, will continue to trouble them today. An example would be: being locked in a cupboard by a playful or malicious sibling and feeling powerless to escape, or getting lost in a busy shopping mall and feeling alone and afraid, or parents arguing loudly in another room and feeling afraid and insecure, or a parent leaving or dying and feeling either abandoned or the cause of their leaving. Next...
- An **unrequited need** - one that was never met at an age when we needed it to be. It would manifest itself in the form of desperate acts later in life, always striving to satisfy the unrequited need. For example, at some time in our childhood we needed the unconditional love of our parent, but instead we were harshly judged or punished. Also, when we made a mistake and needed someone to understand us, we were blamed instead and made to feel ashamed. Our behaviour would be highly affected by these experiences, and in later life manifest themselves as mentally

unstable behaviours like frequent anxiety or panic attacks, or phobias or OCD's. Next...

- A **misinformed or misguided decision** - usually about ourselves and the world we live in, caused by someone we trusted. Because we trusted the person, usually a parent or carer, we would accept the information as true and carry it with us for the rest of our lives, ideas like 'I am not lovable', or 'I'm never good enough', or 'I always do stupid things'. Sometimes, a very distressed parent might say really hurtful things, like: "I wish you were never born" or "if you carry on, I will kill myself". Next...
- **We copied a dysfunctional behaviour** from one of our role-models when we were too young to understand what it meant or decide for ourselves. For example, 'I worry about everything because my dad always did', or 'I treat my children badly, because I was', or 'I learnt to be always angry because my mum was'. Whatever the behaviour of our role models, we made a decision that 'whatever was right for them, was right for us' without knowing what 'right' meant.

Many situations like these happen to us when we are in our formative years. It is how the experience is handled by the adults around us at the time that matters. If there is someone who can 'listen to understand' us then we stand a chance of re-evaluating our experience and make a 'better decision' about ourselves.

On the other hand, if we are not listened to and the experience is left unrecovered, then the experience will fester behind a facade of 'sophisticated' behaviours. Expressions like, "don't be silly", or "don't be a cry baby", or "Don't you ever do that again", "Stop thinking of yourself all the time", all help to build a false impression of ourselves and our identity.

What is important to understand about our anxiety, stress, or mental health condition is that its cause is most likely to be found in our 'conditioning'.

Causes due to biological brain difference (biological)

Our brain function may be affected by a brain difference we are born with or a trauma to our brain subsequent to birth. For example, a condition you

might be born with, such as autism, learning difficulty or dyslexia will affect how your brain works and will present challenges to conforming with societies' expectations. Also, a brain difference could be caused by a blood clot on the brain, or a head injury in a car accident. Part of the brain function will be affected by the event, such as loss of language, emotional control or executive skills. Either way, your brain will function differently to what society expects and that means some activities may not be easily accessible to you.

For some it might be an easy adjustment to take part in society. For others, there may be a need for a more defined diagnosis to identify the adjustment required whether that be medication, therapy or adaptation by society.

Challenges

Probably our biggest challenge in life is to feel 'normal' just like everyone else - whatever that means. Anything that makes us feel different or 'not normal' is one we would work hard to hide from the world. Unfortunately, by keeping our inner fears and anxieties hidden, we will probably cause ourselves more stress, like making excuses for not participating in a social activity that we believe will most probably re-stimulate our anxiety or panic attacks.

We may want to relieve ourselves of the burden by delegating responsibility for our condition to someone or something else. For example, we may say:

- I had a bad upbringing - its all down to my parents
- It runs in the family - its the fault of my genes
- God is punishing me - God is responsible
- I have tried everything - nothing works in this society

Having thoughts like these will stop us taking the right action to resolve our mental health condition. In effect, they render us hopeless or disempowered to take any action. By blaming something or someone else, we render ourselves powerless, only they have the power to change it - not us. Here is a principle that challenges these thoughts:

“Where you are...is where you have chosen to be”

It challenges the belief that our current situation is not down to us. The essence of this principle is: when we feel victimised by someone or something, then it could not have happened without us deciding to be a victim.

I know that this not what people want to hear, they would rather blame someone or something else for their situation rather than take responsibility for their decision.

And of course, not all situations are caused or chosen by us, some are caused by outside events, such as a loved one dying of cancer or being made redundant or being involved in an accident. But in these situations, it is our response to the situation that matters. The essence being...

“Whilst we blame others for our situation, we give away our power to change it.”

It is important to recognise that anyone talking about their story from the victim place, have chosen to take the victim place even if they don't believe it or want to admit it.

The liberating belief is that we are all capable of working it out for ourselves once we accept that we chose our response to an anxiety-inducing situation, albeit rooted in our past.

Choices

If our problem is related to our 'conditioning' then we need someone to help us explore our past programming - effectively a software engineer of the mind - such as a friend, counsellor or therapist.

Or, if our problem is 'biological' then we need someone who is an expert in the workings of the brain - a hardware engineer of the mind - such as a doctor or a psychiatrist.

Counselling or psychoanalysis comes in many forms. Each with its own approach. Although, you may prefer one approach over another, research has shown that good outcomes are more contingent on the relationship than on the approach.

Paramount is feeling safe and accepted by your friend, counsellor or psychiatrist. And when combined with being challenged in a positive constructive way, your chance of a successful outcome are enhanced, whatever the approach.

Another factor to consider is the hierarchical nature of relationships. We are brought up to engage in relationships in a hierarchical way, such as teacher-student or manager-employee or doctor-patient, and of course parent-child. There is an implied hierarchy in any relationship where we engage someone of authority or expertise.

When it comes to your relationship with your friend, counsellor or psychiatrist, it is helpful to recognise that you are the expert in your experiences and life story. Your friend, counsellor or psychiatrist is expert in helping you to feel safe enough to talk out your story, and helping you to identify potential causes of your anxiety or mental health issue. They will also provide the support and education for you to understand the cause of your anxiety and help you work out a suitable solution for yourself.

So what are your choices?

Well, let's start with the simplest and probably the most frequent option taken by most people and work our way incrementally through to the most complex and least frequent option. Starting with:

- **Do nothing** - I guess for many the choice is to carry on as if nothing is wrong. Whether due to unawareness that a problem exists or unwillingness to accept you have a problem, you just carry on with life believing the problem either doesn't exist or will go away by itself. Often it is a self-belief that you will get over it by yourself or it will pass by itself. Or...
- **Talk to a friend** - probably the first person we talk to is a trusted friend or ally. Whoever we choose, we are taking the first step to recovery. It is often

the case that when we share our problem with someone we not only feel better but the solution has a habit of revealing itself. And for many, it is all that is needed. Or...

- **Join a group** - talking to a group of people who experience similar issues is always helpful. We realise that we are not alone and sharing our problem with others is sometimes all the therapy we need. In telling our story to the group we are experiencing the benefit of a 'group listening' which helps us go public with our inner feelings rather than let them spiral out of control. We also learn from people who have had similar experiences. Next...
- **See a doctor** - this is often the first expert we go to. GP's may offer prescribed medication, such as citalopram, as a preliminary treatment which may have the desired effect. Or, they may refer you onto to a counselling service, such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), or a mental health specialist, such as a psychoanalyst or psychiatrist. Or...
- **See a counsellor** - there is an abundance of different counselling disciplines available today, whether private or on the NHS. Now, it is about choosing a discipline that suits you, such as hypnotherapy, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP) to name only a few. Or...
- **See a psychiatrist** - they offer the same approaches as a counsellor or psychologist but they can also prescribe medication. Their specialism addresses both 'conditioning' and 'biological' causes.

For a more detailed list of the various therapies or treatments available see appendix A.

Processes

Nurture is another word for our conditioning or programming - it is what we learn from significant people in our early years, such as parents, teachers or religious leaders. We form our identity based on the beliefs we learn about ourselves and the world we live in. It is similar when coding a software program, a programmer codes certain characteristics into the program

(personality) and tells it how to respond to interactions with the user (relationships).

In the computer environment, when something does not work as expected, we look at the coding. The same is true with us. When we are not working as expected, we look at our coding, i.e., our conditioning, programming or nurture.

In the computer environment, we carefully watch the computer stepping through the program, until the program does not work as expected.

In the human mind environment, we listen to someone telling their story step by step, until we recognise something that potentially is a clue to the cause of their mental health condition.

It is the process of 'listening to understand' where we recognise a potential cause of our mental health issue, such as:

- An **unresolved traumatic experience** - a trauma experienced in our formative years that has a major impact on our adult lives
- An **unrequited need** that was never met at an age when we needed it to be.
- A **misinformed or misguided decision** about ourselves and the world we live in, caused by someone we trusted misinforming us.
- A **copied dysfunctional behaviour** from one of our role-models when we were too young to understand what it meant or decide for ourselves.

We all experience the above at some time in our formative years. It is how we were supported by the adults around us at the time that matters. If they were aware of how a child's mind evolves then they would have helped us to make a sense of our experiences and manage our emotional states effectively.

On the other hand, if the adult was not educated in how young minds work or how to help them make a 'good decision', then the misguided learning will form part of our dysfunctional personality in later life.

It is therefore important to understand that the cause of our anxiety, stress, or mental health condition is most likely to be found in our early years' conditioning, and today it is embedded within our personality and identity.

Listening to understand...

Let's start with a process which by itself is often enough for someone experiencing anxiety, stress or mental health condition to identify the cause.

"In order to find the cause, one must listen to understand."

In the BBC Radio 4 programme Life Scientific, Peter Fonagy said the following...

"One of our core human needs is to be understood."

Peter Fonagy wrote about the process of 'mentalising' our thoughts and feelings in his book 'Handbook of Mentalisation Treatment'. (More on Peter Fonagy and Mentalisation in the Reference section)

Going with Peter Fonagy's findings, the fundamental need of anyone experiencing anxiety, stress or mental health issue is to be understood. Surely, that is reason enough for anyone with a mental health issue to find the right person to listen to them. Although, the challenge is finding someone who can listen in a safe and understanding way.

Most of us think we are a 'good listener' and do not want to be told how to listen. And we are right, we do know how to lend a sympathetic ear to a friend who maybe has just separated from a partner or has been badly treated at work.

Yet, when it comes to listening to someone with a mental health condition, we usually don't have the time, nor the training, nor the empathetical place. Most of us just don't know how to listen to someone who is mentally unwell.

For many people, it is difficult to talk about their inner fears and anxieties. So why should it be any different for someone with a mental health issue?

It depends on how safe I feel with someone, and if I can trust them enough. If I believe that they will judge or punish me, then maybe I will not talk to them. Instead, I will look for someone else, someone who I can trust, someone I feel safe with.

As children, we don't start out in life with trust issues, we learn overtime who to trust and who not to trust. In my opinion, it is the way we are listened to that influences whether we trust someone or not. By that I mean...

"Is someone listening to blame or are they listening to understand."

That might sound too simple, but I believe it is that simple. We will be seen as a safe listener when we listen to understand, and an untrustworthy, unsafe listener when we listen to blame or criticise.

For someone experiencing a mental health issue, it is best to find someone who will listen without blaming or judging. It could be a friend or ally, but it is most probably a trained listener, such as a counsellor who can provide the safe place to talk about oneself.

The benefits of 'listening to understand'...

Listening to understand as a process has many benefits, such as:

- It enables trust to grow in the relationship with our listener, and will therefore encourage us to talk more openly and reveal more about ourselves.
- The more we reveal about ourselves and our situation, the more it will assist us to see our situation objectively. That alone will help us to review and re-evaluate our situation.
- When we are listened to by a non-judgemental listener, the right environment is created for our brain's restorative function to restore our mind back to a more relaxed and stable state (see appendix B for more information).

- Lastly, we have a better chance of finding our own way through our issue, and build trust in our own thinking and decision making.

In summary, by choosing someone who uses the process of ‘listening to understand’, we will:

- grow in self-awareness and self-confidence,
- see ourself and our issue more objectively,
- find our own way through our issue, and
- return our mind to a calm and stable state.

Here is a useful phrase or two to remember...

“We make progress when we listen to understand, and...

...we don’t make progress when we listen to blame.”

Listening to educate...

Where ‘listening to understand’ is a process that helps us identify the cause of a mental health issue, ‘listening to educate’ is a process that helps find the solution.

In the computer environment, we look for blockages or barriers that stop things happening, an error in the design that doesn’t meet the need of the user, miscoding that results in the wrong action, old and out-of date software that needs updating and spyware that hides itself from us.

In the environment of the human mind, we look for similar things, such as control patterns that stop us taking actions, needs that were not met, misguided or ill-informed information about ourselves, the copying of dysfunctional beliefs and behaviour, and hiding things behind a facade or a smokescreen.

To make progress, we must educate people on the challenges of control patterns, unmet needs, misguided or ill-informed beliefs, the blindly copying of a trusted role-model and masking issues behind a facade.

Let me start with a story told to me by Marty Jourard, son of Sidney M. Jourard, a 70's psychologist of human behaviour who I admire immensely and have referenced many times in my books. I asked Marty to review my first book which had many references to his father, Sidney, and this is what he wrote:

'This line jumped out at me from your book. "Who said it was going to be easy?" That's a great point to make. Why place ease above all? My father told me of a dialogue in his private practice...

"But Dr. Jourard, what you suggest I start to do/don't do, that will be hard!" [Sid] "That's right. It WILL be hard. But you can do 'hard.'"

He always maintained that all true growth is painful. If it isn't painful on some level it isn't true growth'. Marty Jourard

This might be the biggest barrier to taking action to resolve a mental trauma. It seems natural to shy away from anything that appears hard or has the potential to cause pain. The lesson Sidney taught his client was 'whatever it takes to resolve your mental issue, you can do it'. This illustrates the educational side to the work of a counsellor or psychotherapist, which is to help their client overcome the barriers that stop them taking action.

People who confront their past traumas not only survive the reliving of their traumatic experience, but also feel a massive relief and release from the control that the past experience has had over them.

Here is another quote from Sidney M Jourard that embodies the 'concept of conditioning'. It is from his book, "The Transparent Self" by Sidney M. Jourard,

"We begin life with the world presenting itself to us as it is. Someone – our parents, teachers, analysts – hypnotizes us to 'see' the world and construe it in the 'right' way. These others [parents, teachers, analysts] label the world, attach names and give voices to the beings and events in it, so that thereafter, we cannot read the world in any other language or hear it saying other things to us. The task is to break the hypnotic spell, so that we become

undeaf, unblind, and multilingual, thereby letting the world speak to us in new voices and write all its possible meaning in the new book of our existence.”

Although his writing has a lyrical tone, he does bestow a certain mockery to what we are brought up to see as ‘right’. Even more intriguing is his assertion that we are blind, deaf, and monolingual to the existence of any other interpretation as a result of our parents’ conditioning.

To my mind, the lesson Sidney M Jourard wants us to learn here is:

“If we are to achieve a new understanding and meaning of the original experience, then we must look again with fresh eyes at what we believe to be ‘right’ as a result of our conditioning. This we can do when we engage our ‘emotional intelligence’ and a good listener to re-evaluate it.”

A key role therefore for the listener - friend, counsellor or psychiatrist - is to help someone use their ‘emotional intelligence’ to re-evaluate their past experience.

Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

Daniel Goleman, the author of a book called ‘Emotional Intelligence’ 1995, proposed ‘Emotional Intelligence’ as a far more valuable measure of someone’s ability to lead than the traditional IQ measurement.

Research shows that Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is a big factor in achieving happiness and success in life. It has more to contribute to building strong relationships, successful careers and healthy personalities than Intellectual Intelligence (IQ), even though the latter has been used for many decades as a measure of suitability for a job.

If our goal is to help someone regain their self-control and happiness, then we must, as their listener, counsellor or psychiatrist, help them to re-engage their emotional intelligence - something we are born with.

Sidney M. Jourard goes on to say:

"We camouflage our true being before others to protect ourselves against criticism or rejection. This protection comes at a steep price. When we are not truly known by the other people in our lives, we are misunderstood. When we are misunderstood, especially by family and friends, we join the "lonely crowd."

Worse, when we succeed in hiding our being from others, we tend to lose touch with our real selves. This loss of self contributes to illness in its myriad forms." - Sidney M. Jourard, "The Transparent Self, 1971.

He is saying that a healthy personality is one that is not hidden from others. His point is by being known all the way through by at least one person, whether friend, counsellor or psychoanalyst, we have the key to recovery.

Betraying the previous generation

I would like to quote another one of my hero's, Charles Kidney, he wrote:

"Sometimes a generation has to betray the generation before, if it is to make progress." (Kidney, 1992)

This muse by Charles Kidney made a big impact on my mental jungle. It gave me permission to think about what my parents (previous generation) had condition me to believe. Although, I think the idea of 'betraying our parents' is unthinkable to many, for me it is not about betrayal. It is about acknowledging all the options, including what has been passed down, and what I can objectively discern for myself today. Choosing the 'right' understanding or meaning is what makes progress in our adult life.

Knowing what to educate...

Knowing what to educate is a matter of picking up the clues as someone talks through their story. For example:

- **Reluctance to take action** - what stops us mostly is our reluctance to re-experience the original trauma and associated emotion. We find many ways to avoid going there, including giving up on our friend, counsellor or psychoanalyst. We need therefore to be educated on how re-experiencing

the 'original emotion' and surviving it (which we will) contradicts our reluctance to ever go there again (which is inhibiting us from taking action).

- **Unmet needs and desperate acts** - the connection between 'unmet needs' and 'desperate acts' or 'obsessive acts' is not something people easily recognise in themselves. For example, desperately seeking love and attention through sexual encounters is an attempt to contradict the feeling of rejection or feeling abandoned. Educating someone to recognise these connections and the consequences is usually all that is needed for them to change.
- **Blind trust in one's parents** - we have built up such a strong trust in our parent's love for us that it is inconceivable that they would do anything to harm us. One can assume that parents are best intentioned to help their children, but if we are to make progress then we must acknowledge that they may have misguided us or misinformed us, as they were by their parents.

It is not a matter of rubbishing parents. Rather, it about educating someone to look objectively at what their parents did or said and using their 'emotional intelligence' to make their own decisions as to whether they were misinformed or misguided.

- **Reluctance to take responsibility** - you will hear people say things like, *"its not my fault, they did this to me"* or *"you don't understand, I didn't ask for this to happen to me"*. As a consequence, they give away their power to change their situation. Only who or what they blame has that power. As their listener, we need to educate them about taking the victim place and that they have **chosen** to take the victim place. Only by accepting that they have chosen the victim place, can they take responsibility for their situation and change it.

The benefits of listening to educate...

Listening to educate as a process has many benefits, such as:

- It enables us to trust that we can relive a traumatic experience and survive it. And, using our emotional intelligence will enable us to re-evaluate our situation.
- It enlightens us to the connection between our desperate or obsessive acts and an unmet need from our childhood. With the new understanding of what drives our dysfunctional behaviour we can make new decisions.
- Knowing that our beliefs and identity may be misguided or ill-informed, gives us the opportunity to rewrite our beliefs and put right our identity.
- Lastly, by taking responsibility for the decisions we made when we were not educated sufficiently to make them, we have the opportunity to take control of our lives and make new decisions that positively enhance our mental health and well-being.

From the counselling perspective, it is the role of the client to tell their story and express their emotion, and it is the role of the counsellor to listen to understand their story and then educate them on the logic of their story. There is always a logic to their story, one that they are not yet able to comprehend.

In summary, to have a listener who can educate us on our mental health and how we can restore a stable state of mind, enables us to take back control of our mental health and well-being and live a happy and successful life.

In Summary

Mental Health covers a wide range of conditions from low-level anxiety through to serious panic attacks. In the main, they are the body's normal responses to feeling threatened. Majority of times, the body is capable of restoring the mind back to a stable state. Other times, you may need support in the form of a 'good listening to' by a friend or ally or maybe a more professionally trained listener such as a counsellor or psychoanalyst.

What can work against restoring our mind to its stable state is paying repeated and chronic attention to the source of the anxiety and the feelings

that it causes. Obsessive focus on our anxiety magnifies the experience into a more serious mental health issue.

It is our lack of education on how the mind responds to feeling threatened and how it recovers itself, which makes us feel incapable of knowing what is happening and what to do. It is our lack of understanding of the logical explanation of our traumatic experience at a time in our development when we are only capable of understanding our experience through our emotions, which makes us feel out of control. Today, we can use our emotional intelligence to make sense of our traumatic experience and the decisions we made at the time.

In this book, you have read about the two possible causes of a mental health issue. It is either rooted in our childhood conditioning or we were born with or acquired a brain difference. It is essential to recognise the symptoms as early as possible and seek the appropriate support whether that be talking to a friend or having a session with a psychoanalyst or psychiatrist.

Essential to your recovery is finding someone you feel safe with and who knows how to 'listen to understand'. Without this, your anxiety is likely to spiral out of control.

The message I want this book to convey is 'education takes the mystery out of mental health'. Once you understand how these things manifest themselves and the decisions you made at the time, you will feel in control, and with the support of a good listener, you will work it out for yourself.

References

Sidney M Jourard, Transparent Self, 1971

Sidney M. Jourard was a clinical psychologist in the 60's and 70's who researched and worked in the field of self-disclosure. His book entitled 'The Transparent Self' (Jourard, 1971) opened my mind to a very important concept:

'Openness [transparency] with at least one significant person is an essential requirement for a healthy personality.' (Jourard, 1971)

Simply put, a healthy state of mind is directly linked to how much we reveal about ourselves to another significant person. The more we reveal, the more authentic we are, and the more healthy we become.

For me, the word 'transparent' in 'transparent self' means opening ourselves up to someone to know us. This type of disclosure brings about change all by itself. Sydney M. Jourard identified the direct relationship between healthy well-being and self-disclosure, and promoted its use in therapeutic relationships.

Whatever your state of mental health, I highly recommend Sidney M. Jourard's concept:

'Being known all the way through by at least one significant person is an essential requirement for a healthy personality.'

Peter Fonagy, The Handbook of Mentalisation-Based Treatment

Peter Fonagy, [OBE](#), [FBA](#), [FACSS](#), [FMedSci](#) (born August 14, 1952) is a Hungarian-born British psychoanalyst and clinical psychologist. He is Professor of Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Developmental Science and Head of the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences at University College London,

Together with Professor Anthony W. Bateman, MA FRCPsych they coined the term “mentalisation” which refers to the ability to talk about and understand one's mental and emotional states. It helps us understand what lies behind our behaviour. It has been described as “Thinking about our thinking”.

Through the process of mentalisation, children learn to develop their sense of identity. Without this capacity, they will have trouble in later life recognising their own and others’ feelings.

Mentalisation reinforces the concepts written about in this book. By revealing your thoughts and feelings to another person, your true identity becomes transparent to another person.

From the place of objectivity, you can begin to rethink your thoughts, re-evaluate your beliefs and take charge of your emotions.

You can find more details on mentalisation in Jon G. Allen & Peter Fonagy’s book entitled ‘Handbook of Mentalisation-based Treatment’.

National Society of Counselling

The National Counselling Society (NCS) was first set up in 1999 by a group of counsellors, psychotherapists, hypnotherapists and psychologists.

The NCS plays an important role within the profession of counselling in the UK and it was one of the first organisations to gain Accredited Register status with the Professional Standards Authority Accredited Register programme.

Their belief is that counselling (and related therapies) should be seen as a vocation (not just a job but a worthy occupation) and that the relationship between counsellor and client is important for the outcome of therapy.

Appendix A - Types of Counselling

Below is a brief summary of the different types of counselling available today.

Note: More information can be found on the website of the National Counselling Society. Below is a link to their website page where you will find the more descriptions of different types of therapy.

<https://nationalcounsellingsociety.org/counselling-directory/types-of-therapy>

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT has become very well known as a treatment of choice within the NHS for symptoms of anxiety and depression. It seeks to change distressing behaviour relatively quickly by challenging unhelpful thoughts and beliefs and teaching the client to use coping strategies in the future. It aims to be 'scientific' by assessing and measuring change and does not prioritise finding original causes or exploring hidden potential. People with compulsive and obsessive disorders, fears, phobias and addictions tend to benefit from this type of therapy. Cognitive-behavioural therapists believe that while it is important to have a good, trusting relationship, but that is not enough in itself. A willingness to do homework tasks in between sessions is considered very important.

Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy uses the technique of hypnosis to induce a deep state of relaxation during which the unconscious mind is highly receptive to new ideas. Accessing this part of the mind through hypnosis can help to change behaviour, attitudes and emotions, as well as manage pain, anxiety, stress-related illnesses and bad habits, including promoting personal development.

Integrative approaches

An increasing number of counsellors describe themselves as 'Integrative'. This means that rather than specialising in one traditional approach, they seek to combine aspects of different approaches to provide the most effective way of working.

Many counsellors describe what they do as integrative without following a specific integrative model. They should be able to explain clearly to you how you will work together and what you can expect.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

The theory of NLP is broken down into three layers:

- Neuro involves creating our own mental map of the world.
- Linguistic involves how we each give meaning to the information.
- Programming involves how we respond to the meaning we have given to information.

NLP techniques are often used to bring about change and improve our personal growth, development and performance.

Person-Centred Counselling

This approach is based on the idea that there are certain therapeutic conditions which are the key to successful personal growth. Most counsellors will have learnt about the ideas of Carl Rogers, who emphasised the importance of the counsellor being warm, empathic, non-judgmental and non-directive. A client in 'pure' person-centred counselling is particularly likely to feel accepted, supported and encouraged.

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis originated with the work of Sigmund Freud, from which many different theories and ways of working have developed. It deals with the exploration of the unconscious mind, and requires a long specialist training. The analyst can make you aware of unconscious patterns so you can change them. Your relationship with the analyst is important as it can highlight your patterns of behaviour within relationships generally.

Psychodynamic Counselling

Psychodynamic counselling developed from psychoanalysis. It focuses on the unconscious mind and past experiences, and explores their influence on current behaviour. You will be encouraged to talk about childhood relationships with parents and other significant people. As part of the therapy you may transfer and pass on deep feelings about yourself, parents and others to the therapist. Although psychodynamic counselling can be practised in a short series of sessions, it is more usual for it to be a relatively lengthy process. It is likely to appeal to people who are interested in exploring their own unconscious processes and who can accept that the changes they are seeking may take time to achieve.

Solution-focused brief therapy

This kind of therapy focuses on a particular issue and promotes positive change, rather than dwelling on the issue or past problems. You are encouraged to focus positively on what you do well, your strengths and resources and to set goals to achieve the changes you want to make. It is likely to appeal to people who prefer a highly practical, goal-oriented approach to problem-solving.

Appendix B - Our brain's restorative function

As part of our involuntary nervous system, we have a restorative function that is essential to restoring calm and stability after a 'flight or fight' response to a perceived threat. It is a subcomponent of our Autonomic Nervous System.

Autonomic Nervous System

The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) is located in our brains regulates our internal organs and some muscles within our body. Its primary function is to set up our response to a threat. And it also has another subcomponent whose function is to restore our mind and body back to its original stable state of calmness.

The following description of the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) comes from the Free Wikipedia. I have shortened it in places to keep it relevant to our discussion on the restorative function of our brain.

(Start of extract from Free Wikipedia)

Our Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) controls the automatic functions of our body. It is sometimes called the 'involuntary nervous system'. It uses two subsystems to control our bodies' response to threats and stresses.

- The **Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)** is activated when we perceive a threat or feel stressed. It is part of our "fight or flight" response. The sympathetic nervous system can increase heart rate; make bronchial passages wider; decrease movement off the large intestine; make blood vessels narrower; cause pupil dilation, goose bumps and sweating; and raise blood pressure. Everything needed to make our survival more certain.
- The **Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)** does the opposite, It works to reverse the "fight or flight" stress response such as slow the

heart rate down and lower blood pressure. When the parasympathetic nervous system is activated, it produces a calm and relaxed feeling in the mind and body, and returns us to our previous stable state of calmness. In this way, the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems balance each other's effects.

(End of extract from Free Wikipedia)

These effects occur involuntary when our autonomic nervous system reacts to any stimulus perceived as a threat. To maintain a healthy state of mind and body, the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) has to balance out the Sympathetic Nervous System's (SNS) response to a threat.

Unfortunately, we can interfere with this balancing act by chronically focusing on our anxiety, as a result our brain's Sympathetic Nervous System's repeatedly triggers our 'flight or fight' response. It is a vicious cycle that intensifying our feeling of anxiety or panic.

When we are listened to in a non-judgemental way, our Parasympathetic Nervous System can reverse the stress response and we restore a state of calm.